

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Operations and Logistics Committee

Notes from the Hypothermia Debriefing for the 2009-2010 Season

Date of Debriefing: Tuesday, April 20, 2010
Time: 1pm-3pm
Location: Catholic Charities 924 G Street NW

Chair: Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities
Recorder: Darrell Cason, Department of Human Services (DHS)
Participants: Partners Involved in Hypothermia Operations during the 2009–10 Winter Season (November 1, 2009 through March 31, 2010)

Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to review the efforts of those involved in carrying out the 2009–2010 Winter Plan to assess what worked and what needs improvement. We will use the information from this session to begin the development of the 2010–2011 Winter Plan. In this session, we addressed broad topic areas set forth in the agenda with the goal of finding ways to enhance services and improve performance during the upcoming winter season. During the 2009-2010 season there were 151 total calendar days, of those, 92 hypothermia alerts were called.

Topic Areas

1. Public Information Campaign

DHS developed and implemented the public information campaign, and generally, it was considered to be a success. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Increasing the level of hypothermia training of 311/911 call center representatives.
- Providing additional affirmative outreach during severe weather.
- Ensuring that hypothermia cards are distributed prior to the start of the hypothermia season.
- Utilizing social networking (Facebook/Twitter).
- Exploring the possibility of posting hypothermia hotline signs on metro buses.
- Ensuring that hypothermia television spots are broadcasted during peak times (this year's ads were mostly shown late Saturday/early Sunday).

2. Calling of the Alerts

There were a few concerns on how the alerts were called at the beginning of the hypothermia season; mainly when extreme weather hit in the middle of October and early November. There was also concern regarding an alert that was called at 4am, which was caused by very high winds. After those concerns were ironed out, the rest of this year's alerts were called effectively.

3. Communications among the Partners

There was a discussion surrounding the possibility of conducting periodic conference calls with providers to check in during the course of the winter season. In previous years, these calls took place on a regular basis however, this year it was decided that the conference calls would only take place if necessary. As a result of this decision, no conference calls took place this winter, and a number of providers feel that scheduled conference calls should be included in next year's plan.

There was confusion surrounding the distribution of blankets, and the blanket request process; many attendees felt that a conference call would have helped to rectify that situation.

As a result of this miscommunication, protocols for requesting hypothermia blankets will be included in next year's plan.

In addition, it was decided that in the future the Operations and Logistics committee will decide if and when a conference call needs to be initiated, and all points' emails will be utilized in order to disseminate information to providers.

4. Service Delivery

There was a general discussion surrounding the effectiveness of this year's staff training, as there was a shift in the training procedures from previous years.

These changes included:

- Shift from massive training to function specific training.
- Change in venue.
- Ongoing customer service training.

The overall sense of the group was that these changes were effective and the same format will be adopted going forward.

5. Transportation

Scheduled Transportation

This was the first year that scheduled transportation from specific sites to shelters was included in the plan.

The main concern regarding scheduled transportation services was that the transportation vehicles were not always on schedule. There were three departure times listed in the published

schedule, but it was not included on the schedule that the last two scheduled buses provide service on an as needed basis.

In next seasons plan, a note will be included that informs residents that the third or latest scheduled bus will only run if necessary. In addition, for increased communication each shelter facility will receive posters of the transportation schedule.

On-Demand Transportation

An attendee was concerned about a constant lapse in transportation from 10pm-12am because of shift changes that occurred with UPO drivers.

Representatives from UPO informed the group that daily shift changes do occur, but the lapse in service last 45minutes to 1 hour. In order to reduce the lapses in service, UPO has committed to research the possibility of implementing staggered or overlapping shifts.

The group was also informed that if issues or concerns arise with the Hotline that these matters should be reported to Ruth Walker – (202) 399-7093 or Frances Bowie (202) 238-4691. In addition, the Shelter Complaint number will be publicized in all shelter facilities, hypothermia information cards and in next year's hypothermia plan.

A suggestion was raised that in case of emergencies similar to the December and February snow storms, that additional transport vehicles should be utilized in order to assist with transporting individuals to the shelter in extreme weather conditions. The group was informed that the pool of transport vehicles is low, but the vehicles that were at the Districts disposal were utilized, however in the future, DHS will attempt to utilize additional volunteer resources in such emergencies.

6. Outreach Services

The discussion started with an assertion that 311 and 911 was not available during this years now storms, and that the 311 and 911 representatives need to complete special training to deal with such emergencies as there was a instance when a client called 311 and the representative was unable to provide proper instructions on how to provide aid to a person who was suffering from hypothermia.

In addition, next year's plan will include increased street outreach from the hours of 4am to 8am provided by The People's for Fairness Coalition.

7. Police and Security

Police

The discussion surrounded MPD protocols to refer homeless persons to the shelter, the group was informed the MPD sends out periodic directives and provides officers with the proper shelter and hotline numbers to call when referring a person to shelter.

A meeting attendee voiced his pleasure in the job that the MPD First District officers do in the area surrounding CCNV, he elaborated that there is increased police presence and that the response time is considerably quicker than in the past.

Security

During the season, a few shelters complained that their security teams were understaffed; the group was informed that TCP did not specifically budget for additional security guards during hypothermia alerts. As a result, additional money was located through DHS and additional security officers were provided. Going forward, TCP will look into acquiring additional security guards as needed.

Starting last year, DHS moved security out of fixed costs, and into contracts in order to create a direct relationship between the provider and the security companies.

Overall, the general consensus was that the security guards did a good job of keeping the facility and its occupants safe.

8. Facilities

Conditions in the hypothermia shelters were generally good this season.

There was concern regarding a issue at New York Avenue shelter where there was no hot water for an extended period of time; a representative from Catholic Charities informed the group that the New York Avenue shelter lacked hot water for a little over two weeks, a repair request was submitted to DRES and the specific piece that was needed in ordered for the unit to run properly took over two weeks to arrive.

In order to remedy this situation, facility maintenance protocols were implemented in the middle of the season and will be included in next years plan. In addition, TCP will provide the ICH Operations and Logistics Committee periodic facility maintenance reports in order to research any patterns or issues that can be solved more quickly.

Another concern was raised around the physical location of hypothermia shelters and the process for choosing the specific hypothermia shelters. It was also recommended that a new strategy is implemented in order to have hypothermia shelters spread across the District evenly.

Going forward, DHS will continue to actively engage additional churches through the Washington Interfaith Network and publicizing the need for churches to serve as hypothermia shelters. In addition, it was recommended that the group looks into additional options in order to maximize the number of church facilities used as hypothermia shelters.

A suggestion was made that the group looks into utilizing government building to serve as hypothermia shelters.

9. Capacity

The general consensus was that the plan did a good job of predicting the capacity for men and women, but failed to accurately predict the number of families that would need shelter during the season.

There was a discussion about the specific data that is needed in order to properly predict the capacity needed for families; it was concluded that predicting family capacity during the season is not an exact science, and in all actuality the demand will outweigh the supply. However, the group will look into developing an improved strategy to forecast the numbers of family beds that will be needed during next year's hypothermia season.

A concern was raised that some families are beginning to see hypothermia shelter as a gateway to housing, and may be presenting themselves as homeless despite the fact that they may have additional options for housing. As a result, DHS will look into the possibility of amending the law in order to conduct research and provide in-depth assessments in order to ensure the validity and effectiveness of the assessment tools.

10. Communication about Client Deaths that May Be Attributable to Hypothermia

This has been a problematic topic because there is supposed to be a process in place for these notifications, but the appropriate parties are not always contacted. It was discussed that all providers need to be informed of hypothermia related deaths.

The group was informed that a government work group was recently started that will provide information on the causes of death involving homeless in the District. The group seemed to have lost momentum because of various reasons, however, DHS will look into reinstating the initiative and report back to the group as soon as possible. In addition, DHS is currently working with MPD and the Medical Examiner's office to establish protocols that will provide DHS with the appropriate information regarding homeless deaths.

During this hypothermia season, there were ten hypothermia related deaths; of that number 3 were deemed homeless.

11. Recommended Action Steps

1. Increase the level of hypothermia training of 311/911 call center representatives.
2. Provide additional affirmative outreach during severe weather.
3. Ensure that hypothermia cards are distributed prior to the start of the hypothermia season.
4. Utilize social networking tools to provide information on hypothermia alerts.
5. Explore the possibility of posting hypothermia hotline signs on metro buses.
6. Ensure that hypothermia television spots are broadcasted during peak times (this year's ads were mostly shown late Saturday/early Sunday).
7. Include blanket request protocols in next year's plan.
8. Send out periodic emails to update providers on any procedure changes during the course of the season.
9. Post transportation schedules in all shelters, and notify clients that the third of latest scheduled bus only runs if needed.
10. Increase street outreach from the hours of 4am to 8am provided by The People's for Fairness Coalition.
11. Implement staggered schedules or overlapping shifts to limit lapses in transportation services.

12. Post the Shelter Complaint hotline at all facilities.
13. Include facility maintenance protocols in next year's plan.
14. Look into the possibility of utilizing government buildings to serve as hypothermia shelters.
15. Develop an improved strategy to forecast the number of family beds that are needed for next season.
16. Establish better communications with the OCME, and clarify the process for notifications about deaths.

Table of Participants (N=32)

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